

WE CLAIM:

1. A support member for use with a vehicle rack to transport boats comprising:

a base configured to attach to the vehicle rack;

5 a resilient expanse connected to the base for contacting a boat hull; and

a spring rib disposed under an upper portion of the expanse allowing compression of the expanse as the expanse flexibly conforms to a shape of a boat hull.

10 2. The support member of claim 1, wherein the support member is generally wedge-shaped.

15 3. The support member of claim 1, wherein the spring rib is connected to a backside of the expanse.

20 4. The support member of claim 1, wherein the expanse has an upper flexible portion and a lower stiffened portion, the flexible portion being supported by the spring rib.

5. The support member of claim 4, wherein the stiffened portion is supported by a load rib.

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6. The support member of claim 5, wherein the load rib extends from a center portion of the expanse to the base.

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7. The support member of claim 1, wherein the base, the expanse and the spring rib are a single integral unit.

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8. The support member of claim 1, wherein the base, the expanse, and the spring rib are comprised of a material selected from the group consisting of high-density polyethylene, polypropylene, and nylon.

9. A support member for carrying different shaped hull boats on a vehicle rack, the support member comprising:

an elongate base configured to attach to the vehicle rack, the base having an inner and outer end portions;

5 an adaptable elongate expanse having first and second end portions;

a first support configured to extend generally vertically from the first end portion of the expanse to the inner end portion of the base; and

a second support configured to extend generally vertically from the second end portion of the expanse to the outer end portion of the base.

10 10. The support member of claim 9, further comprising a third support extending from the expanse to a center region of the base for stiffening a lower portion of the expanse.

15 11. The support member of claim 5, further comprising a fourth support extending from the expanse to the second support, the fourth support being configured to provide flexibility to an upper portion of the expanse.

12. An attachment for carrying different shaped boats on a vehicle rack, the attachment comprising:

a shell having a resilient contact surface for a boat hull, the shell including at least two partial chambers, where at least one of the chambers is substantially deformable as the contact surface flexibly conforms to a shape of the boat hull.

13. The attachment of claim 12, wherein the shell has a contact expanse and a load rib member supporting a lower portion of the contact expanse.

14. The attachment of claim 12, wherein the shell has a spring rib resiliently supporting an upper flexible portion of the contact expanse.

15. A rack for carrying a boat comprising:

a pair of tower bodies, each body having a mechanism for attaching the body to the top of an automobile,

a crossbar connected to the tower bodies, and

5 a pair of support members connected to the crossbar, each support member including an expanse having an upper portion and a lower portion for contacting a boat hull, and a rib configuration supporting the expanse so that the upper portion of the expanse is substantially more flexible than the lower portion to accommodate different hull shapes.

10 16. The rack of claim 15, wherein the rib configuration includes a spring rib supporting the upper portion of the expanse.

15 17. The rack of claim 15, wherein the rib configuration includes a load rib supporting the lower portion of the expanse.

18. The rack of claim 15, wherein each support member has a base that is substantially parallel to the crossbar, and a back wall connected to and extending generally perpendicular to the base.

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19. The rack of claim 18, wherein the expanse, base, back wall, and rib configuration are all formed of a single piece of material.

20. The rack of claim 15, wherein the expanse and rib configuration are formed in a single piece of material.

21. A boat rack for carrying different shaped hull boats on a vehicle rack,
comprising:

at least two pairs of tower bodies, each body configured to be secured to a vehicle;

at least two crossbars, each crossbar being connected to a pair of tower bodies; and

5 at least two pairs of attachments, each pair of attachments connected to a crossbar,

each attachment including a base, a contact surface extending from the base, the contact
surface having a rigid portion and a flexible portion, and a spring rib resiliently
supporting the flexible portion of the contact surface to accommodate different hull
shapes.

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